



SCHOOL COMMITTEE

BUSINESS MEETING OPEN SESSION MINUTES May 21, 2019

Meeting:	School Committee
Date:	May 21, 2019
Location:	Memorial School Conference Room
Attendees:	Pamela Beaudoin, Superintendent Avi Urbas, Director of Finance Shannon Erdmann, Chairperson Rachel Fitzgibbon, Co-Chairperson Ann Cameron Sarah Wolf Caroline Weld Ken Warnock
Absent:	Julie Riordan
Guests:	Principal Puglisi, EDCO Colleen Dolan, Merrowvista Task Force
Recorded by:	Gail Hunter

A. Call to Order – Ms. Erdmann called the School Committee Business meeting to order at 6:10 p.m.

1) Public Comment –

Ann Ranger, 23 Forest Lane, Manchester – stated she was concerned to hear Paul Murphy will no longer be employed by the District. He was the voice and face of the School and she expressed concern he did not receive a “fair deal”. Ms. Erdmann stated it was a personnel issue and the Board could not comment.

Donna Berg, 8 Clauson Lane, Essex – is concerned about the decrease in playing fields during construction of Memorial School and asked if money had been set aside to provide playing time

for all 12 teams in the District on other fields in the area? Ms. Erdmann indicated that playing fields and budgeting needs will be fully discussed at the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year.

Christine Delisio, 6 Lincoln Street, Manchester – stated she was concerned about safety lights on Lincoln St. Ms. Erdmann stated there was an open dialogue with the Town on safety lights.

Teresa Holland, 25 Woodholm Road, Manchester – stated she had forwarded a letter to Memorial School Principal Willis and Superintendent Beaudoin regarding the 4th grade class size at Memorial School. She acknowledged a class size of 22 students was not a big deal for the class of first graders but over time the class has developed issues. She indicated a significant amount of time was being spent on discipline and not on teaching. She had recommendations she would like considered for the class.

Superintendent Beaudoin acknowledged she and Principal Willis had received her letter and would be following up.

Anna Olivia, 37 Central Street, Manchester – stated the 4th grade classroom teacher spent too much time on disciplining the children and the MCAS scores for the class reflect that. She would like to see the teacher spending more time on teaching and less time on discipline.

2) Chairman's Report –

Ms. Erdmann indicated the School Committee had initiated discussions around late start time for High School students. The issue will be tabled during the upcoming school year 2019-2020 in order for the Committee to focus on Memorial School construction and the challenging school budget for the next fiscal year.

The School Committee is currently not in a position to launch a full review of the fundraising policy for the District. However, the Committee recognizes the need to raise much needed funds and has approved a trial period of fundraising with the Boosters while working on a formal policy. A MOU will be provided to the Boosters in early July. Ms. Weld asked Ms. Delisio if early July for the MOU would provide the Boosters enough lead time? Ms. Delisio indicated it would.

3) Consent Agenda –

- Acceptance of Warrants
- Minutes 5/6/2019
- Out of State Travel Request

Ms. Fitzgibbon moved to accept the Consent Agenda; Ms. Cameron seconded the motion. The motion passed with Mr. Warnock abstaining.

4) Sub-Committee Reports

a) Elementary Facilities/MSBC (Ms. Weld and Ms. Cameron)

The Sub-Committee had met with MBTS Conservation Commission and will be implementing the Commission's recommendations. A primary recommendation was to move the exit road to loop around onto Summer Street. W T Rich was fine with the adjustment. Phase 1 has been approved to move forward. The Conservation Commission had 129 questions at the beginning of the process, 20 questions remain to be addressed.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated the scale of the project is significant, the process is taking place in 2 months under the guidelines of MSBA and on a tight site. Ms. Erdmann indicated it was difficult to prep the Town's Conservation Commission and Planning Board on the scope of the full project prior to requesting approvals.

b) Finance Sub-Committee (Ms. Cameron and Ms. Erdmann)

Ms. Cameron stated the Finance Committee has not met.

c) Policy Committee (Ms. Fitzgibbon and Mr. Warnock)

- 2nd Read of Policies
 1. Children of Military Families Policy
 2. Rights of Students in Foster Care

Ms. Cameron moved to approve the policies for Children of Military Families and Rights of Students in Foster Care; Ms. Wolf seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

- Policy Amendments 1st Read
 1. Homeless Students: Enrollment Rights and Services
 2. Admission and Residency Policy

d) Negotiation Team (Ms. Wolf and Ms. Riordan) The Negotiation Team is in recess.

Superintendent Beaudoin indicated receipt of the final copy of the contract from the Union is anticipated over the summer.

5) Continued Business

- HS Special Education Program Review – Colleen Dolan, EDCO Collaborative

Presentation:

EDCO Collaborative was contracted by MERSD to conduct a program review of special education services at MERHS. Through a process that included focus groups, observations and data collection, EDCO's charge was to provide MERSD with a comprehensive report identifying strengths, challenges and recommendations for special education programming at the high school level.

Specifically:

1. How can best practices in inclusive instruction be promoted and supported?
2. Are additional supports needed to ensure smooth transition from MS to HS, i.e. staff training, resources, coaching?
3. Review the roles of guidance and special education and how they intersect. Are changes needed?
4. Is the current pre-referral model effective in providing successful interventions for general education students?
5. How does the Academic Center interface with Special education?

14 Focus Groups, 15 Observations, 22 Parents completed Parent Satisfaction Survey, 19 Staff completed Staff Satisfaction Survey.

MERHS has 9.7% of currently enrolled students eligible for Special Education: 85% of students are in Full Inclusion, 5% in Partial Inclusion and 5% Substantially separate – below State averages.

Program Services Include: Academic Center, The Bridge Program, “U Block” and RULER program

Special Education Programs and Services Include: Learning Strategies, Transitions Program, Swing Program, IRWL

Commendations:

Staffing: Open and Honest shared level of investment in the program, Administration responsive and supportive, Shared model of supervision for special educators, Digital Learning Specialist – works with students to ensure they have appropriate technology accommodations.

Communication: A majority of parents and students with disabilities report they are equal partners in Team Process. They feel respected and believe staff are available and accessible.

Programs and Support Services: The Learning Strategies model of service delivery was also praised by staff, parents and students. Liaisons are viewed as dedicated knowledgeable and compassionate.

Special Education Processes: MERSD is doing well diagnostically. The majority of parents and staff feel evaluations are thorough and comprehensive and accurately reflect their child’s needs.

Summary: Overall, special education is respected at MERHS, parents and general education staff expressed gratitude for the work of special educators and teaching assistants. The array of programming at MEHS is impressive, particularly given the small size of the school. Support programming exists for both students with disabilities and general education students.

Recommendations:

Communication: Staff report communication is occurring informally but would appreciate having a specified time to collaborate. A majority of parents feel general education teachers are aware of their child's disability and related needs and provide accommodations and modifications as documented in the IEP, six or 27% disagree. Focus Groups reinforced a lack of understanding around the intersection of Guidance and Special Education.

Programs and Support Services:

The Teachers Assisting Teachers (TAT) process at MEHS is functioning well. It is recommended the guidance staff be more actively involved in lower tier interventions to support students with social-emotional challenges. The Strategies classroom is shared by four liaisons. Liaisons do not have privacy. The SWING Program is relatively new to the high school as the program grows it will be important to continue to ensure students have opportunities to interact with typical peers. Only 6 parents who responded to the survey agree extracurricular activities are available and accessible for students with disabilities.

Professional Learning:

Teachers across grades at the high school report although they have had disability training, it would be beneficial to be briefed on the students coming the following year, specifically, how their disabilities will manifest in the classroom and what strategies will be useful. Train staff regarding special education evaluation process, special education regulations and Child Find obligations.

Summary: The best way to summarize this report is perhaps to say that if asked in the future where special education is working, I will recommend MEHS. Overall, staff are collaborative, engaged and committed to students with disabilities.

School Committee Comment:

Ms. Cameron asked about the Middle School and the focus on student centered learning and why it appeared that student centered learning is better in High School. Ms. Dolan stated Middle School presents challenges that somehow appear to resolve in High School. Social emotional and peer relationships can be painful in Middle School but when the same group of students reach High School, they manage to identify their peer group. Ms. Dolan stated the system is asking of a lot of kids and Middle School is a challenging time and it may be attributable to hormones.

Ms. Cameron stated parent's feedback was not positive is the solution to this reflected in your recommendations. Ms. Dolan stated it is and the primary reason for the less than positive feedback is lack of knowledge. It's important to include more information and communicate during the orientation process and during regular IEP meetings what types of accommodations are available. Also, what is discussed with General Education teachers needs to be included in Team Meetings, this helps parents be fully aware of all discussions and supports considered for their child.

Ms. Cameron thanked Ms. Dolan for her constructive and positive approach to the review.

Mr. Warnock stated it was good to see the continuum and wondered if there were stories going forward of students who were successful after going through the Special Education track. Principal Puglisi stated the District does survey students currently sophomores in college and she will add a question about Special Education.

Ms. Weld asked about the percentage of children in Special Education indicating the High School percentage is 9.7% and Ms. Dolan indicated that this percentage was down from Elementary Schools and Middle School but the percentage she is seeing does not reflect that information.

Superintendent Beaudoin indicated there were a couple of data clichés in the information the District shared with DESE and the statistics recorded were incorrect, data is being corrected. At the Elementary Schools the percentage of students receiving services is 16% and rising and at the Middle School, Principal Maino, indicated the number of students receiving services is between 12% - 13%.

Ms. Weld also asked about the entry and exit criteria necessary for the District to maintain the integrity of the Special Education programs. Ms. Dolan stated it is important not to keep students in programs too long and it is good to know where students should fall as close as possible.

Ms. Cameron had a follow up questions regarding possible additional solutions for children outside of the programs developed within the District. Ms. Dolan stated a District can build a program, but it is not an overnight process. The program at MERSD is well thought out, well-staffed and supported in appropriate space.

Ms. Dolan went on to state, sometimes there are better solutions for a specific child and the most appropriate program is not available in the District. MERSD is part of the North Shore Educational Consortium which is a great resource offering additional programming.

Mr. Warnock asked about the District's process for resolving issues and does the District act in the best interest of the child? He recognizes Special Education is an intense and emotionally charged area but are mediations and lawsuits handled correctly. Ms. Dolan stated the District's process is right on. The role of Special Education Administrator is a balancing act between the State Law and District Budget, but the charge of the Administrator is to do right things for kids.

Ms. Wolf expressed her thanks and stated she looked forward to reading the full report.

Ms. Erdmann asked about the parent's perception regarding insufficient communication is that because meetings are occurring informally? Ms. Dolan stated not formalizing meetings is a challenge all teachers face. Meetings that happen on the fly are not coming through the Team Meeting process are difficult to address.

Ms. Erdmann asked about Child Find and the obligation to provide notices of academic difficulties. Ms. Dolan stated the Child Find law also relates to social emotional health of a student. A District may have provided services for a student but not fully tested for a disability. The law exist to identify children who should have an IEP.

Superintendent Beaudoin followed up on Ms. Cameron's question to close out the discussion. The Special Education Program at MERSD has been a 7-year team effort and the District has made an amazing amount of progress in that time as reflected by Ms. Dolan's report.

- High School Student Handbook – Principal Puglisi

Principal Puglisi stated the High School would like to present the student handbook for annual approval by the School Committee. The only change to the handbook is the removal of the following language pertaining to Short Term Suspension:

...if the suspension was issued by the Principal, then it may be appealed to the Superintendent. If a student chooses to appeal the suspension, he/she must do so in writing five (5) calendar days after the initial conference was held. Disciplinary action may be deferred at the discretion of the administrator hearing the appeal.

In accordance with Massachusetts General Law, only long-term suspension should be appealable to the Superintendent. The remainder of the handbook remains the same. Dates and other yearly information that does not impact policy will be updated over the summer.

Ms. Cameron moved to approve the edit to the High School Student Handbook in accordance with Massachusetts General Law, only long-term suspension should be appealable to the Superintendent, Mr. Warnock seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

- Grade 5 Field Trip Task Force – Progress Report

Participants – there were 13 participants in the Grade 5 Field Trip Task Force. Mission was to assess whether the annual Fifth Grade Overnight Trip, currently Merrowvista, is the best option to meet our current programmatic and curricular goals. The Guiding Question: is the 5th Grade Overnight Trip the best tool to meet our goals?

January 8th Meeting – Learn the history of the trip and identify its objectives. Objectives: Bring students from Manchester and Essex together. Personal Growth – moving beyond oneself, social emotional growth, whole child. Celebration of the end of elementary school. Maintenance of tradition.

January 29th Meeting – Goal to identify the positives and challenges of the trip as it relates to the following: student accessibility, cost to families and District, impact to grade levels not attending, unintended outcomes and how it meets/does not meet State Curricular Standards.

March 11th Meeting – Look at positives and challenges identified at January 29th meeting to form judgement statements related to each identified area.

How the trip meets stated objectives – Although some students may grow personally by staying overnight, this can be a significant source of anxiety for many students. The daytime activities are effective at creating a shared experience and challenging students to grow. We don't know if this creates a lasting effect in unifying the two schools.

Accessibility – Provides opportunities for inclusion of students with disabilities, however complex students typically do not attend or, if they do, require extensive support and months of planning. Continuous 80-hour duration of program is challenging in terms of budget, staffing and impact on students in home school (K-3).

Cost – One challenge is cost for specific students that require more support/staff to participate in the trip. Although fundraising is different in each school, it does offer the opportunity to unite parents/students with their own community in a fundraising goal for those that choose to participate.

Outcomes – A positive aspect is student may show personal growth in ways not always able to be demonstrated in the school setting. Two challenges of the trip are staffing at the elementary schools and causing stress/anxiety for families.

Final Benefits and Challenges – Benefits: personal growth, inclusion of all students during the day and students overcome anxiety. Challenges: safety/liability of staff, cost of extra staff, impact to K-4 program – staffing at school and family anxiety.

April 23rd Meeting – Discussed possible conclusions, three possible conclusions are shown: 1. The Task Force determined that due to the benefits of Merrowvista this is the right program (this would require a statement on how challenges would be overcome. 2. The Task Force determined that due to the challenges we should phase out Merrowvista and replace with a different day program (determine how to maintain positives) most like for current grade 3 class. The Task Force identified that challenges and benefits and would like guidance from the School Committee upon how to proceed.

Final Outcome – Is the 5th Grade Overnight Trip the best tools to meet our goals? The positions of the members of the group prevented the Task Force from reaching a consensus. Looking for feedback from School Committee: Policy on overnight trips, Liability to the District and Employees and Can we assure that it is a safe and good trip for every student?

Next Steps for Investigation – Sustainability of Staffing, Complete Cost Picture, Understanding Liability, Comparison with other Districts and Consideration of alternatives.

The process according to several members of the Task Force was not an easy undertaking due to the high level of emotions. There was a question asked: did the topics and concerns surrounding Merrowvista apply to the D.C. trip for 8th graders? Principal Maino indicated there are many of the same questions surrounding the D.C. trip.

Ms. Cochand a teacher at Memorial works on coordinating the trip and indicated there are challenges and rewards. She is passionate about maintaining the tradition she participated in as a 5th grade student at Memorial.

Mr. Warnock indicated most everyone present had gone through the program and recognized the Trip is a huge lift, 80-90 hours of intense supervision. The kids who sleep the first night are up the second night. In the end the question is asked what was achieved for the students?

Ms. Fitzgibbon would like to see defined data points, a cost analysis and some idea of what the next steps should be. She suggested surveys for parents and students and the option of developing a program in the Cape Ann area which is a beautiful setting filled with potential activities for the 5th Graders.

Superintendent Beaudoin indicated there are few Districts running a program like Merrowvista and the District needs to fully assess risk management and question if the Trip is any longer part of the core curriculum in which all students participate at any cost. Additionally, the District needs to assess the sustainability as it relates to staff. There's lots to consider beyond discussion and analysis. There are different levels of responsibility and no one wants to see this end with an accusation.

Ms. Cameron asked about parent volunteers and if there was a challenge raising money. She also considered if the program is asking too much of staff. They are doing the fundraising and planning and much without the full support of PTOs.

Theresa Whitman, Essex Parent on the Task Force stated Essex is at a low point of volunteer engagement. The same 5 parents are working on most of the projects. She had no idea the level of challenges involved with the 5th Grade Trip. And those challenges need to be communicated to the parents. That said the communities are resistive to change.

Ms. Wolf thanked Ms. Whitman and indicated she was not surprised the Task Force reached a stalemate. She indicated the School Committee would look at their pieces moving forward. She had 2 children who participated in the 5th Grade Trip and they thought it was good but not life changing. She stated parent fundraising is a heavy lift and suggested surveying 6th and 7th grade parents for information and if students were surveyed the questions would need to be very specific.

Ms. Cameron asked how many nights were involved with the trip there are 3 nights and 4 days defined in the Merrowvista trip.

Next Steps for Investigation – Sustainability of Staffing, Complete Cost Picture, Understanding Liability, Comparison with other Districts and Consideration of alternatives.

The same issues were raised and before reconvening Superintendent Beaudoin will consult with Counsel. She also asked if it was the District's responsibility to shepherd children on their first overnight?

Mr. Urbas working with elementary school Principals and Special Ed Director will gather the cost data for the Trip.

Ms. Field, a teacher at Essex, asked on behalf of several teachers if the legal opinion outweighs the benefits will the Merrowvista Trip take place in 2020?

Superintendent Beaudoin stated given the high emotional impact of changing the Merrowvista Trip she would like to see the cross-district Task Force continue until all facts are considered. If the Policy is to be changed, she would like to know that both schools are represented and working together. She also stated is there is to be an accelerated timeline there are issues to consider now.

Superintendent Beaudoin also stated she does not believe the legal opinion will be to go or not go but a series of option to be reviewed and considered by the Task Force.

Ms. Field stated we met as a team and were respectful of each other and could recognize the different viewpoints but if the legal ramifications outweigh the benefits, we should know sooner what our liabilities are.

Ms. Sartell from Essex expressed concern for the huge impact the trip has on the K-4 programs in both elementary schools. Principal Willis agreed and stated he can see the benefits, but he manages the challenges. Like many of the teachers in the District he has a young family and it is difficult to leave his family for a week. He mentioned every year he faces an 11th hour challenge to identify a teacher who can support the needs of a specific student.

Ms. Erdmann indicated the Committee will check with Counsel. The Task Force will meet and review the legal opinion and work collaboratively through the fall prior to meeting with the School Committee in November 2019.

- Pedestrian Bridge Update

Mr. Urbas indicated the District has signed a release with the insurance company for full compensation of the costs to repair the Pedestrian Bridge, \$178K. He is recommended the funds be deposited in the District's Stabilization Account.

Ms. Cameron moved to accept the compensation of \$178K from the insurance company and to deposit the funds in the District's Stabilization Account; Mr. Warnock seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

6) Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Beaudoin followed up on the enrollment report forwarded to the Committee and indicated there was a common thread with concerns regarding dwindling resources at Memorial. The decrease in staffing results in falling behind in growth opportunities and collaboration. Superintendent Beaudoin believes it is time to sound the alarm the District is running out of resources to handle everything.

Superintendent Beaudoin went on to discuss the agendas and times for the final two School Committee meetings for school year 2018-2019. There will be meetings on June 4th starting at 5:00 p.m. and on June 18th starting at 6:00 p.m. Agendas will be finalized, and forwarded to the Committee in an email.

7) School Committee Comment

Mr. Warnock stated a lot of people drive the Merrowvista Field Trip and are committed to the trip; however, it was important to understand many of the same people are on the edge about the Trip.

B. Adjourn

Ms. Cameron moved to adjourn the meeting; Ms. Fitzgibbon seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

School Committee Future Meetings:

- June 4, 2019, meeting scheduled for 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. (there is a Conservation Commission Meeting scheduled for 7:00 p.m.) agenda TBA
- June 18, 2019, meeting scheduled for 6:00 p.m. agenda TBA
- School Committee will not meet in July 2019
- Retreat is scheduled for August 6, 2019
- First Business Meeting of 2019-2020 is scheduled for August 20, 2019
- School Committee Meeting agendas will focus on School oriented teacher driven presentation: focusing on Diversity, Technology and Curriculum
- Additional area for 2019-2020 School Committee meetings will be budget focusing on program cuts and reorganization
- ELA Task Force Presentation will take place during the School Committee summer retreat
- School Building questions and school building fatigue when construction is no longer new and becomes a distraction will be discussed throughout 2019 – 2020

Ms. Cameron moved to adjourn the School Committee Business Meeting; Ms. Fitzgibbon seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.